

Child psychology



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In today's world the field of psychology has grown to be a very respected science. Objectivity and the scientific method are both part of the psychologists mode of operation. However, even the greatest of psychologists can only theorize about what makes human beings behave and act the way they do. Absolutes are not a part of psychology; everything is relative and open to speculation. In the field of psychology there have been many different areas of interests. Human development is one of the most popular areas of interest for those who study psychology.

Three of the most notable theorists addressing human development are Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget. Each theorist has developed ideas consisting of stages pertaining to human development. Human development considered successful when one passes through various stages, defined by each theorist. Each theory differed in their focus according to each theorist based on different stages. Sigmund Freud is known as the father of psychology. Although some of his work has been dismissed, most of it still holds weight in the world of psychology today.

Freud believed that inner forces or drives fueled human development. He believed that the most powerful of all inner forces was our sexual drive or being. Freud linked sexual desire including any bodily pleasure into most of his work. Each stage focuses on a different area of the body that is a source of excitation and pleasure (Hoffnung, 33). Thus, when Freud discusses the sexual needs of children, they are not similar to the sexual needs that an adult would experience. Children experience sexual gratification in different ways such as sucking their thumbs or retaining their excrement.

Freud specified certain areas of our bodies as erogenous zones such as the mouth and the genitals. Freud's theory on human development is labeled as the psychosexual stages of development. Freud believed that each person as an individual passed through stages in their life based on which part of their body gratified them. According to Freud, if one is fixated on a specific stage, either taking longer in one stage or moving to another stage early, it is believed that individual will develop a disorder later on in life. Freud's psychosexual stages consist of five stages in total.

The Oral stage takes place from birth to about one year of life. During this stage a child is orally oriented and the mouth is the erogenous zone.

Everything a child touches is put in his or her mouth. Freud believes that all pleasure is derived through the mouth during this stage. When a child sucks his thumb he or she does so to gratify him or herself. The second stage of development takes place between one and three years of age, known as the Anal Stage. The erogenous zone shifts location from mouth to anal region.

Freud believes that children experience sexual gratification during bowel movements and when they withhold bowel movements. Some children may even experience pleasure by handling or looking at their own feces. Once the Anal stage has been completed, Freud's next stage of development is the Phallic Stage. The Phallic Stage usually occurs at about three to six years of age. The shift in the erogenous zone moves from the anal region to the genital organs. This stage is also known as the Oedipal Stage. During this stage, children take interest in their sexual organs.

They begin to notice the differences and similarities between themselves and their parents. A child wants to be close and loving to the opposite sex parents. For girls this is referred to as the Elektra Complex. Once the child realizes they can not be with their mother or father, they begin to identify with the parent of the same sex. The next stage is called the Latency Stage which ranges from about six to twelve years old. There is an absence of an erogenous zone in this stage. After the realization that the child can not be attracted to a parent, the child shifts his or her attention to same sexed relationships.

For example, boys will shift their sexual urges and drives to something acceptable such as sports and other physical or intellectual activities. The last stage of Freud's psychosexual development is the Genital Stage. The erogenous zone returns again more powerful to the genital organs. This stage takes place from puberty into adulthood. True sexual desire and mature sexual relationships mark this stage of development. Erik Erikson took Freud's ideas as a starting point and expanded them to cover the entire life span of a human being. He also placed more emphasis on social encounters and identity.

Erikson proposed that development occurs in a series of eight stages beginning with infancy and ending with old age. Each stage is named for a particular challenge that a child must overcome to be able to proceed to the next stage. Successful mastery of the psychosocial crisis at a particular stage results in personality strength, or virtue, that will help the individual meet future developmental challenges (Hoffnung, 34). Erikson's theory was

named the Psychosocial Stages of Developmental Processes. The first stage is trust versus mistrust, ranging from birth to one year.

This stage focused on oral-sensory and the development of trusting relationships with caregivers. According to Erikson, the child develops a sense of optimism or pessimism during this stage. The next stage is autonomy versus shame and doubt, which ranges from one to three years of age. This stage focuses on muscular-anal activity and the development of control over bodily functions. This stage will determine whether or not a child develops a sense of self-certainty. Initiative versus guilt is the third stage of development from three to six years of age.

This stage focuses on genital activity and testing the limits of self-assertion. Initiative is the ability to explore new activities and ideas. Guilt is dealing with self-criticism due to failure. The fourth stage is industry versus inferiority and occurs from six to twelve years of age. This stage focuses on mastery, competence, and productivity. When a child begins school he or she becomes a part of society. They must have the ability to learn the basic intellectual and social skills to be a productive member of society. There are four more stage that make up Erikson s Psychosocial Stages of Development.

These include identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and ego integrity versus despair. These stages continue from adolescence to adulthood each involving a specific crisis one must face. According to Erikson, psychosocial conflicts are never fully resolved. Similar to Freud s beliefs, Erikson also includes that if conflicts from an earlier stage are not resolved they may continue to affect later

development. Jean Piaget was another theorist who was most influential in developmental psychology.

Piaget believed that children's thinking or cognition develops in a series of increasingly complex stages. According to Piaget, an infant's first understanding of the world is based on a limited number of innate schemes made up of simple patterns of unlearned reflexes that are inherited at birth (Hoffnung, 44). Piaget was interested in the child's abilities and senses. Piaget's Cognitive Stages consist of four stages. The first stage is the Sensorimotor Stage. The Sensorimotor Stage begins from birth to two years of age. Coordination of sensory and motor activity begins and object permanence is achieved.

The child will change from a person who responds only through reflexes to one who can organize his or her activities in relation to his or her environment. This is performed through sensory and motor activity. The next stage is called the Pre-operational Stage, ranging from two to seven years old. During this stage children have an egocentric view of the world around them. Language is considered to develop during this stage through the use of symbolic representation as well. From about seven to eleven years of age, Piaget believes children enter the Concrete Operational Stage.

Children begin to think logically and understand rules and form concepts. A child develops an ability to think abstractly and make rational judgements about concrete or observable phenomena. Rules with games are most favorable during this time period. Lastly is the Formal operational Stage. This stage ranges from eleven years old to adulthood. During this stage the child

or person should have the ability to use deductive reasoning, manipulate abstract concepts, to use hypothetical reasoning and creative language.

The person no longer requires concrete objects to make rational judgements.

Each of these psychologists have their own theory on human or child development. However, each theory has their positive and negative aspects.

One problem that all theories deal with is paradigmatic assumptions.

Paradigmatic assumptions are ideas that a theorist takes for granted and uses as facts. An example of this is Freud's notion that some women suffer from a lack of self-esteem or self worth all their lives because of penis envy.

Freud's assumptions could have been a cause of the time period he lived in.

Freud's assumption that sex is the driving force behind everything could also be a result of the time period. I feel that Freud's theory is very controversial.

Children develop at their own pace and this is caused by individual differences such as their culture, upbringing, and environment. Another part of Freud's theory that I question is the Oral Stage of his theory. He states that this stage only ranges from zero to one year of life due to the idea that all pleasure is derived through the mouth.

Through experience I have seen children from zero to about three years old placing everything in their mouths. I feel that one reason behind this is due to teething. Erikson assumes that a child must learn virtues or skills in order that he presented. However, what if a child does not learn them in order? Does that mean that this child will have problems in later development? I disagree with this idea also. In regards to Erikson's theory, someone may

never have a meaningful relationship with another person, but they may develop wisdom.

This would undercut Erikson's assumption that everyone must pass through his stages in a specific order. As for Piaget's theory, I would have to say it is the most reasonable. Again, I feel that a child may develop certain aspects of his stages earlier or later in life due to individual differences. Many children begin to develop language earlier than Piaget's Pre-operational Stage. If a child starts in a social setting at an early age such as a daycare, that child will socialize much faster than child that is not in this environment. This again shows that Piaget's theory doesn't always hold truth either.

Each of these theories are similar by the use of sequencing life's events and the time period they were created. The three theorists differ in their focus. Erikson differs from Freud because Freud's focus is on sexual desire and Erikson focuses on self and social orientation. Piaget differs from the other two because he focuses on the child's abilities and senses. I feel that these theories can be helpful, but I also feel that these theories can be criticized or dissected. I feel that these three theories are simple guidelines for the forever search to understand human development.